

No. 4.

A Death unto Sin and new Birth unto Righteousness.

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Ephesians 5th, 14.

Awake thou that sleepest, & arise from the dead, & Christ shall give thee light.

When the evangelical dispensation is spoken of, either in the Old or New Testament, it is frequently represented under the idea of light. The Prophet Isaiah, describing the blessings of the Gospel-Covenant, breaks out in this sublime exclamation, "arise, shine, for thy light is come, "and the Glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." And again, anticipating the happy state of those who embrace it, he says, "the people that walked in darkness hath seen "a great light—they that dwell in the land of the shadow "of death, upon them hath the light shined."—And St. Paul, describing the effects the Gospel produced in those who conscientiously obeyed it, adds, "if our Gospel be hid, "it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this "world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, "lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine un- "to them." And, in the text, inviting all men to embrace the Gospel, he calls them to awake from their lethargy of

"to arise from the dead, and Christ shall give them light."

In discoursing on which words, I shall shew that every wicked man may be said to be in a state of sleep—even of death:—the folly and danger of continuing in it:—that the only way of escaping the danger is—to wake out of sleep and arise from the dead, by a sincere repentance & amendment of life:—and to encourage every man to set about it, I shall briefly explain the intent and meaning of that gracious promise contained in these words, "and Christ shall give thee light."

Now a habit of sin, we shall find, is, in many respects, one and the same thing to the soul, as sleep is to the body. For, as the bodily senses are rendered inactive by one, so are the rational powers and faculties of the soul numbed by the other.—The Eye, for instance, which is the light of the body, is sealed up in darkness, and excluded, as it were, for a time, by sleep; sin, in like manner, causes a spiritual blindness in the soul by raising up vapours from our lusts and passions, which cast forth a gloomy cloud over the eye of the understanding

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as to intercept the rays it would receive from the light of reason.

And if the case be thus with the habitual sinner—
if “his candle of the Lord be put out in obscurity,” and
the very “light itself, which is within him, be darkness”
—well may we cry out in the words of our Saviour—
“how great is that darkness!” Hence, the wicked in
scripture, are described to be men “who have eyes and see
“not;” who are given up to “a reprobate mind, and to
“blindness of heart.”

Such an one may, with equal propriety, be said to
be dead—not in a figurative or metaphorical only, but in
the strictest and truest, and consequently, the worst sense of
the word—even spiritually dead—“dead in trespasses &
“sins.”—

A person convicted of any capital crime, and on
whom the sentence of death is pronounced, though he has
not received the fatal stroke from the sword of Justice, is
already dead in the eye of the law. This seems exactly
the case of the impenitent sinner; for “since the wrath
“of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness

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"*ness*"—notwithstanding he may have the favor of a short reprieve—he is, to all intents and purposes, already lost & undone for ever!

The habitual sinner may be truly said to be spiritually dead, not only in a legal and moral sense, but also in a physical or natural—that is—his soul is actually in a state of death.

The life of the body depends on its union with the soul; and the soul, which is a spiritual substance—wholly depends on its union with God; so that all its vital energy and operations are entirely derived from the enlivening influences of his Grace and Spirit. If then the life of the soul of man doth entirely consist in its union with the spirit of God; it follows that whenever this union is broken or destroyed, the soul must necessarily be in a state of death: if the breach of union be only for a time, the death, which the soul undergoes, in this case, is only temporary; but if the breach of union be such, that the soul, by these means—is for ever excluded from the presence of God—this is no other than a state of eternal death.—And will the wicked dare to continue in his wickedness, when he

knows he is dissolving the union between God and his soul?

Another obvious reason may be assigned why the habitual sinner may be properly said to be spiritually dead, which is this;—whilst he goes on in a course of sin he is incapable of performing those proper functions which alone can prove him to be alive, or of exerting so much as any one act of a spiritual life. For, to attain to this “his conscience must be purged from dead works to serve the living God by a lively faith in Jesus Christ.”—In short, this spiritual life is the life of a Christian—one who is devoted to the service of his Maker, and who pays a sincere and universal obedience to the divine commands. Every one, therefore, by consulting his own heart, may easily know “whether he is dead in sin, or alive unto God.” For he can have no part in Christ, who “treads Him under foot” by his sins—and “counts his Blood”—which was intended for his sanctification—“an unholy thing.” How can he be born of God, who is so constantly employed in the service of the Devil? Whoever continues in such a state as this, continues in death, “for the life of God abideth not in him.”

I now proceed to the folly and danger which attend such a state.

Both Reason and Revelation teach us that we are not properly the inhabitants of this world, but only "strangers & pilgrims" in it; that the end and design of this present life is only to prepare and qualify us for the enjoyment of a better;—which can be no otherwise effected than by acting according to those rules and precepts prescribed in the Gospel—the observance of which we ought to esteem as the grand concern, the only proper business of our lives: for our good or bad conduct fixes and determines the great, important, and most momentous issue either of life or death, heaven or hell, eternal happiness, or eternal misery!

The folly of a wicked life is enforced by the consideration of its being a state of death. For, as the author of the book of wisdom expresses it—"God made not death—" but ungodly men with their wicked works and words "called it to them."

The Almighty hath "set before us life and death, " blessing and cursing," but He hath represented withal

such an infinite disproportion between them, that no man, who thinks Salvation worth accepting, would ever "chuse the evil and refuse the good."

Is the sinner condemned already? hath "the sentence of guiltiness proceeded against him?" and is he "so fast bound in misery and iron"—so strongly entangled in the snares of death—that unless he repents "he can rise up no more?" Is this his wretched and deplorable situation? and can he deny that he hath wilfully drawn this ruin upon himself, as the just reward of his unrighteous doings?—He has deprived himself of the "light of God's countenance," he is odious in the sight of the Almighty—and "his sins have separated between him and his God."—He is dead to all the motions of the Holy-Spirit—nor can his soul exert so much as one action, one single pulse of a spiritual life. "This is his foolishness; he hath made a covenant with death"—and therefore is worthy to take part with it.

Such is the folly, let us next see the hazard and danger of impenitence,

Now the danger is so unspeakably great, and its dismal event so infallibly certain—that the man who sleeps on the top of a Mast, or on the brink of a Precipice—may be said, in some measure, to be in perfect safety, when compared with the sleeping impenitent sinner. For, though the “Lord is patient, long-suffering, and merciful, and
“delighteth not in the death of a sinner,—though He
“often spares when we deserve punishment, and in his
“wrath thinks on mercy;” yet such a time will come as a day of vengeance; a day when “God will forget to be
“gracious, and will shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure.”

Will the wicked man, notwithstanding, sing a requiem to his soul, and will he still put “the evil-day
“afar off? Yet, let him know, for certain, that his punishment slumbereth not—but a swift destruction shall
“come upon him like a whirlwind: for the day of his
“calamity is near, and the Pit hath enlarged herself to
“receive him.”—In a word—the inevitable danger to which thou art every moment exposed, O wicked man, whilst thou goest on in thy wickedness, is nothing less than

the utter ruin of thyself—both body and soul to all eternity. Be prevailed on then, ere it be too late, “to be wise unto Salvation!”

I now proceed to shew that the only way of escaping this danger is “to awake out of sleep, and arise from “the dead” by a sincere repentance and amendment of life.

That there can be no salvation without remission of sins, and no remission of sins without unfeigned repentance, is a truth well known to all men who are acquainted with the Gospel of Christ. And, on the other hand—“that if the wicked man forsaketh his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, his sins and iniquities shall not be his ruin—but he shall save his soul alive.”

If God, by the gracious whispers of his Holy-spirit, or by the louder voice of some heavy affliction, should awaken thee, O Sinner, out of thy spiritual slumber into a lively sense of thy approaching ruin—in order to thy speedy and effectual recovery, “call thy own evil ways to remembrance,” consider how thou camest into so sad, so wretched, & so deplorable

rable a condition. Be assured, wherever thou lookest, thou wilt discover nothing but a gloomy scene of horror and misery: if thou shouldst turn thy eye inward upon thyself, and shouldst survey the unhappy state of thy soul, thou wilt be there presented with a black and frightful catalogue of thy sins, and with the ghastly wounds of a bleeding conscience. If thou lookest abroad for comfort, thou wilt see "the terrors of the Almighty" setting themselves in array against thee—then wilt thou cry out in bitterness of soul—"Have mercy upon me, O Lord my God! "Lighten mine Eyes that I sleep not any longer in "death!"

Now it is that the Eye of the sinner's understanding is opened, and the Light of Revelation breaks in upon his soul:—and that therefore, now it is, he is convinced, entirely owing to God's infinite Mercy, that "he "is not consumed." God grant such conviction may take possession of every sinner's heart! may it be enforced by the impressions of the Spirit of Grace! and may they produce "the fruits of good-living!"

But the act of repentance is not yet complete—the

sinner is to "cease to do evil and to learn to do well"—he is to renounce his most beloved sins—a change must be wrought in the very temper and constitution of his soul—or, in the words of the Apostle, he must "be transformed" "by the renewing of his mind"—his thoughts, desires, & affections must flow from Religion—and the general bent and inclination of his heart must be ever fixed and pointing towards God as the only proper object of his love, and the ultimate end of all his actions. In a word, to be a Christian, is "to be created in the image of God in righteousness and true holiness"—it is to "redeem the time" "past by walking henceforth in newness of life" and entire obedience to the will of God.

When the penitent sinner is happily arrived at such a state as this, he may then be said to have made a true use of the advice in the text—by "awaking out of sleep and" "arising from the dead."

I am now to encourage—and God grant I may prevail on every one who hears me, immediately to set about this great and necessary work of repentance, by briefly explaining the intent & meaning of that gracious promise

contained in these words, "and Christ shall give thee
"light."

This gift of Christ, if it be duly weighed and considered, will be found in itself infinitely great, and in its value inestimable, since it imports no less than the union of all that is truly good and desirable. For as ignorance, error, and unbelief, sin, misery & death are all comprized under the name of darkness—so the word Light includes life & faith, wisdom & knowledge, holiness & purity, joy & comfort, peace & happiness both here and hereafter. This is the Light which Christ will give us to
"enlighten our darkness—if with a true faith we turn
"unto him—these are the great and the precious promises
"which He lays up in store for them that fear Him."

And now what stronger motives can be proposed to a sinner to prevail with him to forsake his sins? what can he wish for more than to be fully assured, that though he was once dead in trespasses & sins, yet if he truly repents he shall be quickened by the Holy-Spirit—and be made a living member of that body which hath a vital union with Christ its head; so that "the life which he shall then

"lead in the flesh, will be the life of Christ—for Christ
 "shall live in him, & his life shall be hid with Christ
 "in God:" Then will he find that, though he once was
 darkness, "yet now he is light"—that his night of igno-
 rance & error is past, and that "the day-star will arise
 "in his heart—and "the sun of righteousness" enlighten
 his mind with "knowledge which passeth all natural un-
 "derstanding"—his soul will be filled with that heavenly
 wisdom which "will make him wise unto salvation."

But further—the Penitent may assure himself
 that although "his sorrow & heaviness might endure for
 "a night, whilst he was breaking up the fallow-ground
 "of his heart," and sowing it with the seeds of piety and
 religion; yet his light "shall break forth as the morning,"
 & the time is at hand "when he shall reap in joy:"—for
 "Christ, by offering himself once for all, hath washed us
 "from our sins by his own blood, and cancelled the
 "hand-writing that was against us by nailing it to the
 "cross:—there is therefore no condemnation to them that
 "are in Christ Jesus"—no sense of guilt disturbs their
 ease, no melancholy thoughts molest them—but rather

they now rejoice evermore "in the answer of a good conscience towards God."

A most desirable—a most happy state! It is the kingdom of heaven begun in the soul—which as the Apostle tells us, is "love & peace, & joy in the Holy-Ghost"—it is, notwithstanding, the object of evangelical perception—since it fills the breast of every faithful Christian with unspeakable comfort, and "gives him quietness & assurance for ever".

This is that Light which our gracious Redeemer freely gives to all true penitents here below, as a sure and certain pledge of that eternal Inheritance which He hath purchased for them with the Saints above in Light and Glory.—Of which, that we may all be Partakers, God grant, &c.

Theoph^{us}. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers Hall.

